

Wrong Turn by forever_bright

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Summary:

Steve finds himself on the edge of giving up and Billy finds himself trying to help.

1. Chapter 1

It was Tuesday and Billy was sitting in the Camaro, fingers tapping away on the steering wheel as his mind jumped between where he could get booze tonight and the bloody details of the Civil War that he'd gotten surprisingly caught up in during last period history, when he noticed Max struggling to walk across the carpark. She was carrying not only her skateboard, schoolbag and gym bag, but also a large guitar case that was throwing her off-balance. He was surprised none of those little geeks she hung out with had jumped in to help her carry it.

Billy kept watching as she made her way over and opened the passenger door, dropping her skateboard on the seat as she tried to lift the guitar case over into the back. Billy didn't help, and after a few long seconds she managed to get it in.

"What's that?" asked Billy, once Max was in the car and they were driving out of the carpark.

"A guitar," said Max, her tone flat. She was looking out the window and Billy frowned over at her, not liking that she was ignoring him when he wanted answers to reasonable questions. There was no way they had the money to afford nice shit like that leather guitar case, let alone the instrument inside it.

"Where did you get?" he pressed, his voice sharper. Max shot him a pissed off glare and then went back to looking out the window. "Hey," snapped Billy at her, getting louder and not planning to let this go. Money was a sore topic in their house and perhaps Max was blissfully unaware of how tight things were, but Billy sure as hell wasn't. His dad reminded him every second day.

"Steve," ground out Max eventually. Billy blinked and tried to get his head around that for a second.

"Harrington?"

Max shot him a 'duh' look and Billy made a face, feeling something slimy twist in his stomach. Billy wasn't any sort of angel, but he still

knew when something was just straight up wrong.

“That guy is a fucking perve, you realise that,” he said to Max, shaking his head and reaching for his packet of smokes on the dash. “Did he ask you for anything for it?”

“Nothing,” snapped Max, perhaps not understanding fully what Billy was implying, but knowing it was bad. “He’s my friend.”

“Oh yeah, he just loves hanging out with a bunch of little kids, ‘cause that’s not fucking creepy,” said Billy, blowing out smoke and trying to keep his cool. He should drive over to Harrington’s house and beat the shit out of him. Again.

“I told him I wanted to learn ages ago and he gave it to me, why do you have to ruin *everything*,” said Max and there was something in her voice. Billy couldn’t say what it was, but he knew Max as a vicious, fearless and angry pain in his ass, and she didn’t sound right. He looked at her and her hands were twisting in her lap.

“What it is?” he said, trying hard to keep his calm. If Harrington had actually... if he’d touched her, Billy would kill him. At least if he got arrested and sent to fry, he’d know he’d done one good thing in his miserable life.

“I dunno,” replied Max. They never talked like this and it was tense, strange. Billy didn’t like it. When he glanced over at Max again he could see her thinking hard and he waited, forcing himself not to speak. He could feel the rage boiling inside him, burning and growing and getting into his muscles and making his heart pound, but she had to say it.

“Steve gave Dustin some stuff too. It was, you know, expensive stuff, like his camera. He was just... he was weird.”

Billy had a moment where the memory came to him of Harrington on the ground in their last basketball practise, Billy laughing over him. He hadn’t seemed to care when Billy stole the ball off him, pushing him over and then letting everyone know what a useless player he was. Harrington had just walked away.

He hadn't been at practise today.

The hot rage inside him turned to ice in an instant. It froze and his chest tightened, and he pulled over the car because every instinct Billy had was suddenly screaming at him.

Without speaking, Billy turned towards the backseat and flipped over the black case, finding the latches and opening them. Cushioned inside was a shiny and smooth guitar.

"Fuck," he breathed, because it was beautiful. "This is a Ripley."

It looked brand new and must have cost hundreds of dollars. It was the sort of guitar Billy used to stare at in shop windows and dream of owning one day – he'd imagine heading back to Cali and playing in a band and living off music, with only his guitar and a couple off bucks in his pocket.

"Steve just gave it to me," whispered Max beside him, also looking down at the case.

Billy snapped the lid shut and was surprised how hard he was finding breathing, how fast the panic had hit him. It was probably nothing and Harrington was just a wealthy prick who liked to make kids happy, but Billy didn't think so.

He kept thinking about the dull look in Harrington's eyes yesterday when Billy had taunted him.

"Where does he live?" asked Billy, revving the engine and speeding towards their house. It was only a few minutes later he was pulling up at the curb and Max was hesitating with her hand on the door.

"Billy," she said and then stopped. Neither of them wanted to say it, this idea that was hanging in the car and poisoning the air, and for the first time in his life Billy found himself wanting to protect Max from something.

"Nothing to worry about, kid, just go start your homework or whatever," he lied smoothly, leaning over and opening her door for her. She grabbed her skateboard and got out, hanging about for a second before beginning to climb up slowly towards the house.

Billy let out a breath and then he began to drive towards Harrington's house, trying not to admit to himself why he was driving so fast or why his heart had been beating in his throat since the moment he'd seen that guitar.

2. Chapter 2

Notes for the Chapter:

hi guys, read the warnings and take care.

As he drove too fast down empty streets, Billy mentally reminded himself that Harrington had the perfect life, and Billy was probably just being over-dramatic. And come on, surely good-looking, rich guys didn't have any reason to...

He told himself he should try and score some beer on his way back home from Harrington's place. He swung the car around a corner and there was still nobody around.

Billy tried to get his heart to slow down.

He had wanted to like Harrington. When Billy had moved here and found the place to be more boring and redneck than he could ever have imagined, he had thought maybe Steve Harrington would be an easy guy to hang out with. People talked like he was cool, like he was fun and liked to drink and play ball, and Billy thought boys like that seemed in short supply. He'd played a bit rough, wanting to make sure Harrington knew Billy wasn't just some loser that was going to follow him around, but he'd expected some push back. He'd thought they'd have some banter and one-upmanship, and then they'd be cool.

Instead, Harrington just didn't seem to care. He didn't bite back, didn't ever take up Billy's invitations to talk shit about girls. He seemed more interested in keeping his boring girlfriend happy than having a conversation with Billy, or anyone else.

Billy had wanted to like Harrington, but there was no way he was going to give the time of day to a guy that looked at him the way Steve did.

Except, sometimes Billy thought... he thought Harrington was looking at him differently. The way Billy looked at him, when there was nobody else around.

But then there had been the creepy house in the woods and all those kids, and Billy had been desperate to fuck something up that night and Harrington had just been there. That had been the end of end of that.

Billy reached the street that Max had told him and he slowed down to cruise along, squinting out his window at the numbers on the letterboxes, often lost in shadow or behind fancy gardens. When he reached the right number, he looked up at the house. There were a couple of lights on and Harrington's car was in the drive.

"Ah, shit," muttered Billy to himself, suddenly feeling like a total idiot. Harrington would probably call the cops when he saw him. He tapped the steering wheel restlessly, deciding what to do, but in the end Billy had driven all this way and he had to check, had to see that Harrington was okay and then he could get the hell out of this stupid fancy-ass neighbourhood.

Pulling himself out of the car, Billy strode up to the front door and knocked hard. He expected some posh lady to answer and he was already making up a lie about being in Harrington's science class, but his knocking echoed into silence and there was no answering sound from inside the house.

Billy's stomach twisted.

He knocked again, harder this time, shaking the door. His knuckles hurt and he had the strangest flash to the feeling his knuckles hitting Harrington's face, and how much they had hurt the next day.

He stood on the doorstep for a few seconds. He felt wrong in this nice street in front of this big house, and Billy half expected a neighbour to appear and ask him what he thought he was doing. There was only silence, though, and it was setting Billy even more on edge.

Stepping off the front step, he walked around the edge of the house, looking through the windows. He knew it now looked like he was casing the place, but it didn't seem as though anyone was around to get suspicious. Everything inside looked normal - and plush and perfect, and Harrington really did have it good - before Billy reached the side gate.

He'd come this far and Billy couldn't go home yet. He pulled himself up and climbed over the fence, landing on the path on the other side with a soft thump. Immediately, he could see Harrington sitting by a big pool lit with hazy lights.

Billy took two steps towards him and opened his mouth to call out, to make his presence known and make it clear he wasn't there to cause trouble despite what it probably looked like, when he saw the shotgun lying at Harrington's side.

Oh *fuck*.

Billy froze, but his steps had been loud on the gravel path and Steve turned his head in Billy's direction, spotting him.

"Hargrove?" he said, confused.

"Yeah," said Billy. He couldn't quite get his limbs to move. "Sorry to crash your party."

Steve laughed, tipping his head back, his movements a little slow. Finally, Billy managed to make himself unfreeze and he cautiously walked towards the pool. He didn't think Harrington would shoot him, but he had nearly beat the guy to death a month ago...

"You come to finish the job?" asked Steve, his thoughts obviously going in the same direction as Billy's.

Closer to the pool and Steve, Billy could see a mostly empty bottle of whiskey sitting between Steve's thighs, his legs dangling over the edge and his feet in the water. The bottom of his jeans were wet and the gun was less than a foot away from him. Billy stopped when he was by the edge of the water.

"You drink all that?" asked Billy, nodding to the bottle.

God knows, he'd gotten low when he was wasted, had driven too fast with the road spinning in front of his eyes, he knew the sensation of all those feelings hitting you and having no way to get out. He knew how you got to that place, but it wasn't usually at 6pm on a Tuesday after school.

“Yeah,” Steve said. He was looking up at Billy and he didn’t sound drunk, although there was a slight heaviness to his words. He didn’t even seem surprised to find Billy standing by his pool in the late afternoon light.

Unsure what the hell to do, Billy sat down too. He half expected Harrington to offer him the bottle, to act like everything was okay and that shotgun wasn’t sitting on the tiles between them. Harrington just went back to staring down at the water, though, his eyes unfocussed and his shoulders slumped.

“What’s the story?” asked Billy after a minute of silence. Steve turned his head slightly towards Billy. “Let’s be real here, man, you’re obviously in a bad fucking place and you’re creeping me out.”

Steve shrugged and kept staring at the water. He kicked his feet a little, making waves.

Billy wished he hadn’t left his smokes on the dash in the Camaro. He really needed something to do with his hands right now. He flicked a tear in his jeans and wondered if he should grab the gun away from Harrington.

“You’ll feel better when you’re sober,” he said instead, because that sounded like the sort of thing an adult would say in this situation. Steve just snorted, though, rolling his head back and staring up at the sky.

“I was sober before but I couldn’t do it,” he admitted to the setting sun, fingers closing around the neck of the bottle. “I thought a few drinks and maybe I’d be able to.”

“Jesus, Harrington,” breathed Billy, his face scrunching up. This was so, so too much for him to deal with. He shifted, kicking his legs out, and Steve snapped his head towards the movement.

“Don’t go,” he said.

“I’m not,” replied Billy. “But just... tell me what’s so bad, okay? Because I know I should be saying everything will be okay and whatever, but honestly your life looks pretty good to me.”

I bet your dad doesn't hate you, he thinks. I bet you have a future to look forward to and enough money buy new clothes.

"A friend of mine died here," Steve said and it's not at all what Billy is expecting him to say.

"Seriously?"

"Well, not really my friend," continued Steve, lips curling slightly in a self deprecating fashion, "She wasn't cool enough for me, but if someone dies in your pool, that makes them your friend, right?"

"She drowned?" queried Billy. He knew he should probably be steering Steve onto happier topics or something, but he was curious. He hadn't heard about a kid dying at Harrington's house and that seemed like it would be big news. Steve didn't answer his question.

"So I come here and I talk to a dead chick who Nancy thinks I killed, and it probably should have been me. I mean, my pool and my stupid party. And she was a way better person than me at, you know, everything."

"You're a good person," said Billy automatically, and then cringed at how unlike him that sounded.

For the first time, Steve seemed to focus in on Billy. It was almost as though he could have been talking to anyone or only himself until this point, but now he was frowning at Billy consideringly.

"You hate me," Steve pointed out.

"Maybe, maybe not," replied Billy and he flashed Steve a flirty smile. It had the desired effect of turning Steve's frown into a eye roll.

"My face remembers it differently."

"Bad day," shrugged Billy. Steve was still looking at him and Billy felt like he could see the drunken cogs turning inside Steve's head. Billy really wanted to drink some of that whiskey or maybe just jump in the pool, something to break this weird conversation and stop him forcing himself not to look at the gun that was still within easy reach of Steve's right hand.

“I want to-,” Steve said, and then stopped, taking a breath and clenching his jaw. He tensed his shoulders and said in a rush. “I like boys.”

Billy just stared. He couldn't even begin to get his head around what the fuck Harrington was doing right now. Steve seemed frustrated when Billy didn't say anything.

“You hear me?” continued Steve and he moved, pulling his feet out of the water and leaning towards Billy. “I said I'm a fag. Do you... maybe I want to suck your dick, Hargrove.”

It sounded so wrong. Forced and painful, and it made Billy cringe, raising a hand to put a physical barrier between Steve's insanity and himself.

“Stop,” he ordered harshly. And then he realised what Steve was doing. “Are you trying to get me to beat you down? Is that the plan? You're too much of a pussy to do it yourself, so you think I'll smash your brains in for coming onto me?”

Steve deflated and rolled away, running a hand through his hair as he got to his feet. He left the bottle on the ground and shuffled over to a desk chair, collapsing down onto it. It creaked under the sudden pressure.

Billy immediately reached over to pick up the shotgun, placing it on the other side of himself away Steve. Then he grabbed the whiskey and took a long drink, desperate for something to take the edge off.

“This is good,” he commented, putting down the now empty bottle and surprised not to feel a burn in his throat. The bottle was a heavy glass and the label had gold on it.

“Dad's special stash,” answered Steve, his voice muffled as he was lying with an arm thrown over his face.

There was silence again as Billy enjoyed the noticeable warmth spreading through him from the liquor in his stomach, and he looked up at Steve thoughtfully. This whole conversation had been completely unexpected and awful, but it had left him with some

questions.

“Are you actually queer?” asked Billy.

“Maybe,” replied Steve, not moving his arm. He let out a sigh and Billy watched his chest fall. “Yes.”

“Huh,” said Billy. The sun had gone down and the sky was a pink, with a few clouds adding lines of purple. Billy traced a crack in the tiles with his finger and watched Steve breathe. “Me too.”

It took two seconds for Steve to sit up straight, eyes wide as he looked down at Billy.

“Wait, what?”

Billy just grinned, all teeth.

“You gonna take back that offer to suck my dick? Because I wouldn’t say no.”

“Oh, come on,” groaned Steve, but he was still staring at Billy and there was something in his face, an interest that had been lacking before. None of the dullness that had been wrapped around Steve since Billy arrived and it was a relief to for Billy to see. “Does anyone know?”

“My dad, who would prefer I was dead. He thinks I’ll grow out of it.”

“Jesus,” said Steve, all big eyes and sympathy. Billy decided that he’d had enough of sitting by this pool where some girl died and Steve had been thinking about joining her.

“Look,” said Billy, sitting up and brushing off his hands on his jeans, “You got anymore booze? Because full disclosure, I’ve got no idea what to say to you right now, but I don’t want you to off yourself and I’m going to hang around until I’m sure you’ve shaken the fuck out of it.”

Steve let out a huff somewhere between exasperation and laughter, and Billy could see that he seemed to have shifted from the mood that Billy had found him in. It didn’t mean much, because Harrington

might wake up tomorrow and go looking for the shotgun again, but it was enough for now.

“Sure,” he said, getting up and then offering Billy his hand. “There’s nothing alcohol can’t fix, right?”

Billy accepted the hand and when he was on his feet, he studied Steve’s face for a second. It was a strange feeling, knowing Steve was like him. That he looked at boys and saw them the same way Billy did. Sometimes it felt like Billy was the only one in the whole world who didn’t like girls, or at least not only girls, and it was almost pathetic how sweet the relief of knowing he wasn’t alone felt.

“Your parents around?” asked Billy, letting go of Steve’s hand.

“Nah, they’ve got better things to do,” said Steve and he led Billy towards the house.

3. Chapter 3

Billy stayed with Steve all night. He started off tense every time Steve got that far off look in his eyes again, worried that the other boy was going to make a dash for the door and for the gun outside, but after an hour or so Billy finally accepted that while Harrington might not be okay, he seemed to have mellowed into a more resigned attitude.

Sitting on the fancy couch and drinking Steve's beer wasn't the worst evening. Billy found himself watching Steve and it was a strange luxury, knowing that he didn't have to keep his eyes to himself or cover up his curiosity in case he stared longer than was normal.

He liked looking at Steve. He always had, since the moment he'd see that stupid hair in the hallways. He liked Steve's energy and his long legs, and his strange facial expressions that seemed to display every thought that was going through his head, and while he'd been pissed off when Steve ignored him, that didn't mean he didn't like to look.

"So," said Billy, eyes fixed unashamedly on Steve, who was gazing out of the window towards the pool again. The TV prattled on in the background. "Why today?"

"Hm?" Steve dragged his eyes over to Billy's face, frowning slightly.

"Why today?" repeated Billy. "It's just another shit day in a shit town, so why did you decide to do it today?"

"Had a bad night," admitted Steve. He was strangely open about the whole thing and it still kinda weirded Billy out, but he guessed maybe Harrington didn't have any one else to talk to about this twisted stuff inside his head. The house was still empty, after all. "Just stuff with my mum, and then I just, I thought I saw-," he paused to chuckle, biting down on his lip, "I actually don't even know if this is real right now. It doesn't feel real. I don't think I'm really here."

"Righttt," replied Billy, eyebrows shooting up. Steve's eyes had kinda glazed over again. Billy threw a cushion at him and Steve caught it, blinking. "Sounds like you need to get out of your head."

"If only." Steve's smile was brittle.

"Can't you go hang out with Wheeler or someone?"

"I don't want to be a downer," said Steve.

"And you think them finding out you've knocked yourself off wouldn't be a downer?"

Steve shrugged, but he did look a bit embarrassed. He had wrapped his arms around the pillow Billy had thrown at him, squeezing it to his chest and it made a Billy uncomfortable how young he looked. He preferred to see Steve as either a rival or as a pretty distraction, not some kid who needed some serious help.

"This is some heavy shit," he said, the words spilling out of him without much thought. Steve looked at him and smiled again, a rueful and apologetic expression.

"Why'd you come round anyway?" he asked.

"Max was worried," admitted Billy. He took a swig of his beer. "Said you were acting weird."

"Smart kid."

"Apparently."

They both let their eyes drift back to the TV and they watched the evening news, a strange parody of a normal night in suburbia. Billy spread his legs and relaxed back into the couch, half watching the screen and half watching Steve, knocking back beer after beer. Steve relaxed slowly as the minutes passed, his shoulders loosening and after nearly an hour, he rearranged himself on the couch. He lay down with the pillow behind his head and his legs dangling over the edge.

When Billy looked over again, planning to ask where the bathroom was, Steve was asleep. Billy didn't realise how tense he'd still been until he saw Steve's slack face, half squashed against the back of the sofa. Billy sucked in a long breath.

Why the hell would Harrington want to kill himself? For all their conversation that evening, Billy still didn't understand it. Steve was so... good. At everything. Billy didn't get it, but he'd also found he liked being a person Steve talked to. Nobody ever really talked to Billy, not about serious stuff or things that were real, and it was a relief not to have to drown in bullshit for once.

It seemed like he and Harrington had a few things in common. Shitty parents, fucked in the head and wanting to touch boys.

Billy didn't want Steve trying something like this again.

Pulling himself up off the couch, and finding himself a little unsteady for a second, Billy went to take a piss and then had a quick look around the house. It seemed just as nice as he'd seen through the window, but now he was inside there was a strange emptiness to it. The beds looked untouched, like a hotel or something, and the big study where Steve had clearly swiped the expensive liquor from was too neat to be used often.

Taking his time, Billy went outside and grabbed the shotgun from the now dark poolside. It felt heavy in his hands and he really didn't like the thought of Steve holding this, of thinking about this as a solution to whatever problems he was having. With a pissed off frown, Billy took it inside and unloaded it, putting the gun back in the study where he could see Steve had taken it from. He locked the wooden cupboard door and put the keys in his pocket. He wasn't planning on giving them back.

Walking back to the living room, Billy shrugged off his jacket and boots, settling down onto the empty couch next to where Steve was still sleeping. It wasn't as comfortable as a bed but it was warm and soft, and Billy was wrecked from feeling way too much in the last few hours.

"Night Harrington," he said to the quiet room and then he closed his eyes, his alcoholic numbed brain quickly slipping into unconsciousness.

4. Chapter 4

The sound of a phone ringing woke Billy. In his drowsy state he longed for it to stop, waited for Max or Susan to get it, but then it did stop and Harrington's voice slammed into his sleep-dazed consciousness.

"Hi Mom," he said, and he sounded like he'd also been also been asleep only seconds earlier. "Yeah, yeah, slept through my alarm... No, I won't be, don't worry... Yeah, everything's fine. Sure, I'll leave the money out. Okay. Yeah, I should go to school. See you Saturday."

Billy blinked his heavy eyes open, rolling over so that the morning sunlight pinched at his skin. He managed to focus just in time to see Steve come and stand over him.

"Hi," said Steve. He had been running his hands through his hair and it was sticking up at all angles. Billy stretched out, feeling tightness in his back from sleeping on the couch, and he grinned up at the other boy, tucking his arms behind his head.

"Morning," he said suggestively. Steve just blinked at him, looking overwhelmed. Billy rolled his eyes. "You feeling less dramatic this morning?"

"Screw you," sighed Steve, not moving. He wrung his hands slightly and then shrugged. "Look, thanks for last night and everything, I guess, but we have to go to school, so..."

"Yep," said Billy, letting the 'p' pop on his lips. He pulled himself up to sitting, still feeling a warm shadow of sleep but quickly shaking that off, rubbing his eyes as he reached for his boots. "I'm driving you."

"Um, no." Steve still sounded a bit out of it, like the combination of whatever place he'd found himself last night and the alcohol and Billy on his couch had short-circuited his brain. Billy frowned down towards his shoelaces.

"Yes. Get your shit and let's go."

“Dude, I’m not letting you drive me to school.”

“You are,” said Billy, standing now and giving Steve a big fuck-you smile, “because otherwise I’m going to tell Wheeler and all Max’s little friends what you tried last night.”

Steve’s face was pure shock, his mouth literally slightly open. It was as though he was genuinely surprised by Billy’s dirty tactics, which Billy found strange considering he’d been a total bastard to Steve since day one and surely it had to be expected by now. He couldn’t suppress a huff of laughter at Steve’s picturesque expression, and then he shouldered past him and headed for the bathroom.

Billy was still wearing the same clothes he had worn to school yesterday, and while he didn’t particularly give a shit, he also didn’t want to give anyone at the school a reason to talk about him or suggest he couldn’t afford clothes. They would swing past his place in the way in and he’d grab Max at the same time.

Smacking on some cologne he found in the vanity, Billy assessed himself in the mirror.

He looked a bit worse for wear, but still better than Harrington. That guy really needed a shower, but Billy wasn’t anybody’s mother and at this stage Billy was only worried about keeping him alive.

Billy saw his jaw clench in the mirror and felt that same sick swoop in his stomach.

Fuck. He was going to keep Harrington alive, that he promised himself.

Outside in the hallway Billy found Steve lingering by the front door, looking annoyed and exhausted and handsome, head tilted back against the wall. He had changed into some fresh clothes, but his hair was still a mess and he was staring at the ceiling. The big house was completely silent around them and it was set back far enough from the street that Billy felt like he could hear the sounds of the dust moving in the beams on sunlight that were steaming through the windows by the door.

Billy wondered what was happening inside Harrington's head when he got that empty look on his face. He didn't think it was good.

"Let's go," he said loudly, striding past Steve and opening the door. Steve's head turned to follow him and his expression gathered into a confused grimace as he followed along after Billy, locking the door behind them.

"You smell like my dad," he said accusingly, face still scrunched up.

"Really, is it turning you on?" shot back Billy, just to be a dick, and he was rewarded with another look of overwhelming disgust from Harrington. He was grinning as he unlocked his car and the smile didn't fade until they were flying down the streets towards Billy's house.

He thought about driving over here the night before. He thought about the sickness in his stomach. He thought about the shotgun lying too close to Steve's fingers.

When they pulled up, having spent the trip in silence, Max was bounding out the door before Billy had even turned off the engine. She must have been watching out the window. They passed each other, Billy climbing the steps and already pulling off his jacket for a quick change, and Max with the skateboard tucked under her arm, eyes angry and intense.

"Was Steve okay?" she asked, as always straight to the point.

"Ask him yourself," replied Billy, not stopping. The house was empty, with Susan and his dad leaving for work before the school run, and Billy tugged on a fresh tshirt and shoes. On his way out he stuck some cheese between two slices of bread, stuffing it into his mouth and strolling back to the car.

Both Max and Steve gave him identical expressions of distaste at the piece of bread hanging out of his mouth, and he grinned broadly as them as chewed it.

"Buckle up," he said, revving the engine.

The ride to school was more talkative than the silent drive from

Steve's house, and Billy found himself shocked at how good Harrington could fake it. He asked Max questions about things, let her do most of the talking, but he still managed to sound half-interested and even make her smile. He was a long way from the sad zombie that Billy had spent the night with, and he wondered if the people around Steve even knew how messed up he was. If they would have been surprised when it came out that he'd...

Billy's insides twisted again. He swallowed hard and ignored the feeling.

Once Max was out of the car and on her way, Billy drummed his fingers on the wheel and glanced at Steve.

"You should be moving to Cali, Harrington. Acting skills like that and you could be a movie star."

Billy had a skill for making compliments sound incredibly insulting. He was expecting Steve to glare at him, hopefully tell him to go fuck himself, but Steve just shrugged and stared out the window. It was frustrating and a small part of Billy wondered why Steve didn't fake it with him, didn't put on a smile and just play the game like he did with everyone else.

When Billy pulled into the high-school carpark, he walked away from Steve as soon as they were out of the car.

Some of Harrington's 'friends' could look after him for a while and Billy could get on with his own shit.

However, walking away from Steve turned out to be easier said than done for Billy. He found himself turning around almost the moment he was in the hallway, checking how far Harrington was behind him, and from then the rest of his day was spent watching Steve, or at least keeping an eye out for him, or sitting in classes they didn't share and tapping his foot, wanting to get out and scope out where Steve was. Billy had always known himself to be an intense person, he'd had a few girls tell him that and more recently a guy call him 'fucking full on' right before breaking it off with him, so he wasn't completely surprised to find that once he'd locked onto Steve Harrington, he couldn't think about much else.

Also, Hawkins was a boring as dogshit town and Billy didn't have much else to do.

The afternoon arrived and when they got to basketball practice, Billy kept half an eye on Steve as he got told off by the coach for skipping the previous day. Steve didn't seem much more interested in this than he had the rest of the day, simply ducking his head and nodding at the appropriate moments. It made Billy mad, because from what he'd heard, Steve used to be completely into all this high-school stuff. Now that he was so clearly lost deep in his head and nobody even bothered to ask why. They just yelled when he missed stuff. Billy hated adults.

The practise was fine, a fun way to pass an hour and Billy was wiping the floor with everyone, when Tommy decided to shove Steve over in a crude imitation of the move Billy had pulled multiple times. The coach did call a charge and Tommy said something that Billy couldn't hear, as he was catching his breath down the other end of the court. He felt a surge of protectiveness, a desire to go and shove Tommy harder than he'd hit Steve, but Billy wasn't really planning on doing anything about it. He didn't need to act like an idiot when he'd sent Harrington to the ground so many times himself (and he was always making sure that nobody, for a single second, would think to call him *faggot*).

Billy was taken completely by surprise when Harrington pulled himself up and launched himself at Tommy.

Steve was a terrible brawler, but he'd surprised everyone with the retaliation and managed to get in a couple of decent punches before Tommy found his footing and smacked Steve on the jaw. Steve then tackled Tommy to the ground, the pair of them hitting the polished gym floor with a muted thud. Before Steve could get in any more punches, Billy arrived and was hauling him backwards with an arm around his chest.

"Get off me," Steve snarled and the rest of the team was stunned by his reaction to Tommy, the boys shooting confused glances between Tommy's bloody face and Steve's struggles against Billy's grip. Steve was usually so mellow. The coach was helping Tommy up, looking furious, and he pointed at Billy.

“Get him out of here,” he ordered and Billy was happy oblige, dragging Steve for a few steps before the other boy gave in and turned away, walking with Billy towards the locker room.

“So what did he say?” asked Billy, staring at Steve pulled open his locker and started to get changed. The fire had disappeared as suddenly as it had come, leaving Steve with only a small frown as he tugged his shirt over his head.

Billy didn’t know what to make of the outburst. If he was totally honest, he was a bit pissed off about it. He’d been trying to get Steve to lash out for months, trying to get under his skin, and getting nothing in return. One stupid word from that idiot and Steve flips his shit. It felt a bit unfair.

Steve pulled on his shirt without saying anything. Billy slammed his locker door shut forcefully, crowding into his space.

“You’ve never laid one on me during practise, he must have said something real bad,” pushed Billy, needing something, needing Steve to give him anything to explain. The stink of the locker room was heavy in his nostrils and Billy felt wild with sweat glistening on his skin.

Steve stood still, taking a breath, his hair falling across his face as his gaze hung below Billy’s chin. Then he looked up and a cheeky smile stretched across his face, his eyes suddenly bright.

“Maybe I like your face too much to mess it up,” he said, like it was *normal*, like it was okay for a guy to say that to another guy and Billy found himself smiling in surprise, for once forgetting to smirk and pretend like he didn’t give a shit. Harrington was flirting with him and it was so ridiculously cute.

“I guess that makes sense,” replied Billy after a beat, the comeback lacking his usual bite, instead sounding lower and playful. Harrington grinned again and it was such a relief to see, such a change from the sadness and moody tension, that Billy couldn’t resist being a reckless idiot.

He leaned forward and kissed Steve, pressing him against the metal

of the locker door, and it was only a couple of seconds, but Billy's heart was thundering in his chest. He pulled away - turned on, but still aware of the ten boys outside that could walk in at any moment - and Harrington was still grinning at him.

"I'm driving you home," said Billy, turning to his own locker and grabbing his stuff, his fingers clumsy and shaking as he began to get changed. Adrenaline was washing over him and he knew if he looked in Steve's direction, if he saw that smile directed at him again, he wouldn't be able to control himself.

Goddamnit. He'd always been a sucker for a pretty face.

"Sure," said Steve. He sounded happy. Billy didn't understand it, still had no idea what was going on inside Harrington's head, but he planned on sticking around to try and figure it out.